

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) last week praised the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (S. 3307) in the House of Representatives. The bill contains the most significant improvements to the child nutrition programs in over 30 years, and it includes critical provisions from Congresswoman McCollum's National Farm to School Act (H.R. 5456).

"As a former teacher, I know that hungry students cannot fulfill their potential in the classroom. Grumbling stomachs distract them from their schoolwork," said Congresswoman McCollum. "Over 600,000 Minnesota children benefit from the National School Lunch program. With this difficult economy putting more people into poverty, this program provides a lifeline for families struggling to feed their children. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act will improve the quality of meals served in schools, allow for easier determination of eligibility, and finally update nutrition standards so that our children get well-balanced diets."

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, there has been an 8.5 percent increase in the number of students on free and reduced lunch since 2009. In St. Paul, over 900 additional students qualified for free and reduced lunch this year due to the growing number of families facing economic hardship.

Section 243 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act also includes language from Congresswoman McCollum's bill to provide grants up to \$100,000 for school districts to implement farm to school programs. Roughly 100 Minnesota school districts now have programs that purchase fresh produce from local farmers -- more than triple the number from 2009. This legislation also provides \$40 million in funding for farm to school efforts.

"Such strong support for farm-to-school programs in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act will provide a win-win for our children and Minnesota farmers," said Congresswoman McCollum. "Farmers are able to access local markets and keep more local food dollars here at home while giving schoolchildren more nutritious food in their lunches. We will now be able to expand our Minnesota model to be replicated nationwide thanks to this bill."

S. 3307 will further strengthen the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Currently, over 137,000 Minnesota children receive WIC benefits and over 93,000 Minnesota children receive meals through the CACFP. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act allows WIC providers to be able to certify children with less paperwork and expands eligibility for the CACFP program to allow more children to be able to obtain free or reduced price meals at day care and afterschool programs.

The bill was finally passed after Republicans used a procedural move yesterday to obstruct passage.